

T H E
L O U N G E R.

[N^o XCIII.]

Saturday, Nov. 11. 1786.

Fortunatus et ille Deos qui novit agrestes.

VIRG.

ONE of the great pleasures of a periodical Essayist arises from that sort of friendly and cordial intercourse which his publication sometimes procures him with worthy and respectable characters. The receipt of the following letter has added to the list of my acquaintance a gentleman whose person indeed I am ignorant of, but whose sentiments I respect, whose sorrows I revere, and whose feelings I am persuaded many of my readers (even in these days, which he holds not very susceptible of such emotions) will warmly participate.

To the AUTHOR of the LOUNGER.

S I R,

I, As well as your correspondent *Urbanus*, was very much pleased with your late Paper on the moral use of the country, and the portrait of the excellent Lady it contained. I am an old man, Sir, but, thank God, with all my faculties and feelings entire and alive about me; and your description recalled to my memory some worthy characters with which my youth was acquainted, and which, I am inclined to believe, I should find it a little difficult, were I even disposed to look out for them, to supply now. At my time of life, friends are a treasure which the fortunate may have preserved, but the most fortunate can hardly acquire; and, if I mistake not in my opinion of the present race, there are not many friendships among them which I would be solicitous to acquire, or they will be likely to preserve. It is not of their little irregularities or imprudencies I complain; I know these must always be expected and pardoned in the young; and there are few of us old people who can recollect our youthful days without having some things of that sort to blush for. No, Mr Lounger, it is their prudence, their wisdom, their foresight, their policy, I find fault with. They put on the livery of the world so early, and have so few of the weaknesses of feeling or of fancy! To this cause I impute the want of that rural sentiment which your correspondent *Urbanus* seems to suppose is banished only from the country retreats of town-dissipation, from the abodes of fashionable and frivolous people, who carry all the follies and pleasures of a city into scenes destined for rural simplicity and rural enjoyments. But in truth, Sir, the people of the country themselves, who never knew fashionable life or city-dissipation, have

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now exchanged the simple-hearted pleasures which in my younger days were common amongst them, for ideas of a much more selfish and interested sort. Most of my young acquaintance there (and I spend at least eight months of the year in the country) are really arrived at that prudent way of estimating things which we used to be diverted with in *Hudibras* :

“ For what’s the value of a thing,
“ But as much money as ’twill bring ?”

Their ambition, their love, their friendship, all have this tendency; and their no-ambition, their no-love, their no-friendship, or, in one word, their indifference about every object from which some worldly advantage is not to be drawn, is equally observable on the other hand.

On such a disposition, Mr Lounger, what impression is to be made by rural objects or rural scenery. The visions which these paint to fancy, or the tender ties they have on remembrance, cannot find room in an imagination or a heart made callous by selfish and interested indifference. ’Tis with regret rather than resentment that I perceive this sort of turn so prevalent among the young people of my acquaintance, or those with whom I am connected. I have now, alas ! no child of my own in whom I can either lament such a failing or be proud of the want of it.

I think myself happy, Sir, that even at my advanced period of life, I am still susceptible of such impressions as those which your 87th Number imputes to rural contemplation. At this season, above all others, methinks they are to be enjoyed. Now, in this fading time of the year, when the flush of vegetation, and the glow of maturity is past, when the fields put on a sober, or rather a saddened appearance, I look on the well-known scenery around my country-dwelling, as I would on a friend fallen from the pride of prosperity to a more humble and a more interesting situation. The withering grass that whistles on the unsheltered bank; the fallen leaves strewed over the woodland path; the silence of the almost naked copse, which not long ago rung with the music of the birds; the flocking of their little tribes that seem mute with the dread of ills to come; the querulous call of the partridge in the bare brown field, and the soft low song of the red-breast from the household shed; this pensive landscape, with these plaintive accompaniments, dimmed by a grey October sky, which we look on with the thoughts of its shortened and still shortening light; all this presses on my bosom a certain still and gentle melancholy, which I would not part with for all the pleasure that mirth could give, for all the luxury that wealth could buy.

You say truly, in one of your late papers, that poetry is almost extinguished among us: it is one of my old-fashioned propensities, to be fond of poetry, to be delighted with its descriptions, to be affected by its sentiments. I find in genuine poetry a sort of opening to the feelings of my mind, to which my own expression could not give vent; I see in its descriptions a picture more lively and
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better composed than my own less distinct and less vivid ideas of the objects around me could furnish. It is with such impressions that I read the following lines of Thomson's *Autumn*, introductive of the solemn and beautiful apostrophe to philosophic melancholy.

" But see the fading many-colour'd woods,
 " Shade deepening over shade, the country round
 " Imbrown; a crowded umbrage, dusk, and dun,
 " Of every hue, from wan-declining green
 " To sooty dark. These now the lonesome Muse,
 " Low-whispering, lead into their leaf-strown walks,
 " And give the season in its latest view.
 " Meantime, light-shadowing all, a sober calm
 " Fleeces unbounded ether; whose least wave
 " Stands tremulous, uncertain where to turn
 " The gentle current: while illumin'd wide
 " The dewy-skirted clouds imbibe the sun,
 " And thro' their lucid veil his soften'd force
 " Shed o'er the peaceful world. Then is the time,
 " For those whom wisdom and whom Nature charm,
 " To steal themselves from the degenerate crowd,
 " And soar above this little scene of things;
 " To tread low-thoughted Vice beneath their feet,
 " To soothe the throbbing passions into peace,
 " And wooe lone Quiet in her silent walks."

About this time three years, Sir, I had the misfortune to lose a daughter, the last survivor of my family, whom her mother, dying at her birth, left a legacy to my tenderness, who closed a life of the most exemplary goodness, of the most tender filial duty, of the warmest benevolence, of the most exalted piety, by a very gradual but not unperceived decay. When I look on the returning season of this calamity, when I see the last fading flowers of autumn, which my *Harriet* used to gather with a kind of sympathetic sadness, and hear the small chirping note of the flocking linnets, which she used to make me observe as the elegy of the year! when I have drawn her picture in the midst of this rural scenery, and then reflect on her many virtues and accomplishments, on her early and unceasing attentions to myself, her gentle and winning manners to every one around her; when I remember her resignation during the progress of her disorder, her unshaken and sublime piety in its latest stages; when these recollections fill my mind, in conjunction with the drooping images of the season, and the sense of my own waning period of life; I feel a mixture of sadness and of composure, of humility and of elevation of spirit, which I think, Sir, a man would ill exchange for any degree of unfeeling prudence, or of worldly wisdom and indifference.

The attachment to rural objects is like that family-affection which a warm and uncorrupted mind preserves for its relations and early acquaintance. In a town, the lively partiality and predilection for these relations and friends, is weakened or lost in
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the general intercourse of the multitude around us. In a town, external objects are so common, so unappropriated to ourselves, and are so liable to change and to decay, that we cannot feel any close or permanent connection with them. In the country, we remember them unchanged for a long space of time, and for that space known and frequented by scarce any but ourselves. "Methinks I should hate," (says a young Lady, the child of fiction, yet drawn with many features like that excellent girl I lost), "methinks I should hate to have been born in a town. "When I say my native brook, or my native hill, I talk of friends, "of whom the remembrance warms my heart." When the memory of persons we dearly loved is connected with the view of those objects, they have then a double link to the soul. It were tender enough for me to view some ancient trees that form my common evening-walk, did I only remember what I was when I first sported under their shade, and what I am when I rest under it now; but it is doubly tender, when I think of those with whom I have walked there; of her whom but a few summers ago I saw beneath those beeches, smiling in health, and beauty, and happiness, her present days lighted up with innocence and mirth, and her future drawn in the flattering colours of fancy and of hope.

But I know not why I should trouble you with this recital of the situation and feelings of an individual, or indeed why I should have written to you at all, except that I caught a sort of congenial spirit from your 87th Number, and was led by the letter of Urbanus, to compare your description of a personage in former times, with those whose sentiments I sometimes hear in the present days. I am not sure that these have gained in point of substance, what they have lost in point of imagination. Power, and wealth, and luxury, are relative terms; and if address, and prudence, and policy, can only acquire us our share, we shall not account ourselves more powerful, more rich, or more luxurious, than when in the little we possessed we were still equal to those around us. But if we have narrowed the sources of internal comfort and internal enjoyment, if we have debased the powers or corrupted the purity of the mind, if we have blunted the sympathy or contracted the affections of the heart, we have lost some of that treasure which was absolutely our own, and derived not its value from comparative estimation. Above all, if we have allowed the prudence or the interests of this world, to shut out from our souls the view or the hopes of a better, we have quenched that light which would have cheered the darkness of affliction, and the evening of old age, which at this moment, Mr Lounger, (for like an old man I must come back to myself), I feel restoring me my virtuous friends, my loved relations, my dearest child!

I am, &c.

ADRASTUS.

E D I N B U R G H :

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